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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALEXANDRIA 000190

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: UPTURN IN FUNDAMENTALIST
ACTIVITY IN THE DELTA

REF: (A) CAIRO 4357, (B) ALEXANDRIA 150

11. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

12. SUMMARY/COMMENT: COMMENT: ALEXANDRIA AND THE DELTA HAVE, SO FAR, TRAILED UPPER EGYPT AND CAIRO IN TERMS OF VIOLENT FUNDAMENTALIST ACTIVITY. WE DO NOT BELIEVE NORTHERN EGYPT IS IMMUNE TO THIS KIND OF ACTIVITY AND ARE SEEING AN INCREASE IN RELIGIOSITY AND SIGNS THAT VIOLENCE MAY NOT BE FAR OFF. END COMMENT. FORTY EIGHT PERSONS WERE ARRESTED MARCH 8; EIGHT JIHAD MEMBERS WERE ARRESTED MARCH 15 FOR BREAKING INTO A MOSQUE IN THE GHARBIA GOVERNORATE TOWN OF ZEFTRA AND TRYING TO TAKE IT OVER, AND WE ARE HEARING OUR FIRST REPORTS OF EGYPTIANS OBJECTING TO AMERICANS GOING ABOUT WITHOUT THEIR HEADS COVERED. END SUMMARY.

THE ALEXANDRIA ARRESTS

13. FORTY EIGHT PEOPLE WERE ARRESTED IN ALEXANDRIA ON MARCH 8. ALTHOUGH SOME WEAPONS WERE FOUND THERE WERE NONE OF THE CLASHES THAT WERE ASSOCIATED WITH SIMILAR MEASURES ELSEWHERE IN EGYPT. BY CONTRAST, A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF ISLAMIST ANTI-GOVERNMENT PRINTED MATERIAL WAS SEIZED.

THERE ARE CONFLICTING STORIES ABOUT WHO AND WHAT THOSE ARRESTED ARE. ONE POLICE OFFICER TOLD US ALL THOSE ARRESTED WERE FROM UPPER EGYPT AND THAT SOME WERE INVOLVED IN THE KILLING OF THE BRITISH TOURIST LAST OCTOBER AND OTHER ATTACKS ON TOURISTS. OTHER POLICE SOURCES INDICATED THAT THOSE ARRESTED WERE ACTIVISTS (PLANNERS, ORGANIZERS) AS OPPOSED TO TERRORISTS. THE PRESS REPORTS THAT 11 OF THE 48 ARRESTED HAVE ALREADY BEEN RELEASED.

14. THE PRESS CLAIMS THAT AT LEAST SOME OF THOSE ARRESTED BELONG TO "HEZBOLLAH", BUT THERE IS CONFUSION ON THAT SCORE AS WELL. ONE POLICE SOURCE DENIED THAT HEZBOLLAH WAS PRESENT IN ALEXANDRIA AT ALL. ANOTHER SOURCE SAID THE NAME HEZBOLLAH WAS ADOPTED BY A SMALL GROUP OF EXTREMISTS WHO HAD BROKEN AWAY FROM THEIR MAIN GROUP BECAUSE OF A DISPUTE OVER CONTROL AND HAD CHOSEN WHAT THEY THOUGHT WAS A CATCHY NAME.

MOSQUE TAKE OVER

15. EIGHT MEMBERS OF JIHAD WERE ARRESTED FOR BREAKING INTO A MOSQUE, USING CHAINS TO ATTACK THOSE SAYING PRAYERS AND ATTEMPTING TO TAKE OVER THE MOSQUE FOR THEIR OWN PURPOSES. THE INCIDENT OCCURRED IN THE VILLAGE OF SHOUBRA MALAS IN ZEFTA IN THE DELTA GOVERNORATE OF GHARBIA. THERE WAS A CLASH BETWEEN THE INTRUDERS AND THE "CONGREGATION", BEFORE INTRUDERS WERE ARRESTED. THIS INCIDENT CLOSELY RESEMBLES ANOTHER ATTEMPTED TAKE OVER OF A MOSQUE IN KAFR EL ZAYAT, ALSO IN GHARBIA, IN AUGUST 1992. THE

AUGUST INCIDENT WAS REPORTEDLY PERPETRATED BY
ACTIVISTS FROM UPPER EGYPT ATTEMPTING TO FORM JIHAD
CELLS IN THE DELTA.

16. THE PRESS ALSO REPORTS A MARCH 17 INCIDENT IN
TANTA, THE CAPITAL OF GHARBIA GOVERNORATE. TWENTY
EIGHT FUNDAMENTALISTS ARE ACCUSED OF ATTACKING A
SHRINE AND ATTEMPTING TO DIG UP THE COFFIN OF THE
SAINT TO WHICH IT IS DEDICATED. ACCORDING TO THE
FUNDAMENTALISTS, REVERENCE OF SAINTS IS AN
ABERRATION.

HEJAB FOR AMERICANS?

17. TWO AMERICAN WOMEN RESIDENT IN ALEXANDRIA WERE
WAVED OUT OF AN ANTIQUE SHOP IN TOWN THIS WEEK
BECAUSE THEY DID NOT HAVE THEIR HEADS COVERED. AT
LEAST ONE OF THE WOMEN IS A GRANDMOTHER AND BOTH
WERE CONSERVATIVELY DRESSED. BOTH HAVE SHOPPED IN
THE AREA BEFORE AND NEVER ENCOUNTERED A PROBLEM.

COMMENT

18. TO DATE ALEXANDRIA HAS BEEN SPARED THE VIOLENCE
ASSOCIATED WITH INCIDENTS IN UPPER EGYPT AND EVEN
CAIRO. THERE IS, HOWEVER, A DEFINITE INCREASE IN
FUNDAMENTALIST ACTIVITY AND, FOR SOME LONGTIME
RESIDENTS, AN ALMOST PALPABLE CHANGE IN THE ATMOSPHERE.
AS NOTED, THERE IS SOME CONFUSION AS TO
WHO IS DOING WHAT IN THE ALEXANDRIA AREA. GOE
OFFICIALS JUMP AT ANY CHANCE TO ATTRIBUTE PROBLEMS
TO FOREIGN INFLUENCES, WHILE ALEXANDRIA OFFICIALS
JUMP AT ANY CHANCE TO CLAIM THE TROUBLEMAKERS COME
FROM UPPER EGYPT. THERE PROBABLY IS SOME EXTERNAL
INFLUENCE AND THERE MAY BE UPPER EGYPTIANS WHO HAVE
COME TO ALEXANDRIA TO ESCAPE POLICE ATTENTION AND/OR
TO ORGANIZE; THEY HAVE BEEN FOUND HERE BEFORE. BUT,
EVEN WITHOUT THEM, ECONOMIC DISSATISFACTION AND A
TREND TOWARD FUNDAMENTALISM HAVE EXISTED FOR SOME
TIME PRIMARILY AMONG THE POORER ELEMENTS OF
ALEXANDRIAS POPULATION, EVEN IF THIS HAS NOT YET
SPURRED THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE SEEN IN UPPER EGYPT
AND, MOST RECENTLY, IN CAIRO.

SCHELL